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# John's Island Burial (38CH68)

Richard Polhemus

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JOHN'S ISLAND BURIAL  
(38CH68)

by

Richard Polhemus  
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JOHN'S ISLAND BURIAL  
(38CH68)

by Richard Polhemus

The excavation of an irrigation ditch on the Bryers Plantation at the south end of John's Island disturbed a grave containing the remains of four individuals and associated trade goods. Mrs. Laurie Townsend and her father, Robert Berry, the present owner, discovered the grave, on February 6, 1971, and recovered the disturbed skeletal material and many glass beads from the back dirt pile. Dr. Robert L. Stephenson was contacted by Mrs. Townsend about the find and visited the site on May 24. Only a small portion of the burial pit extended beyond the limits of the irrigation ditch and the relative position of the four individuals and the associated material could not be determined in the field.

An examination of the material, kindly loaned to the Institute for study by Mrs. Townsend, provided several suggestions concerning the mode of the burial and the date of the burial. The material was cleaned and catalogued by the Institute staff prior to examination by myself and Dr. Ted A. Rathbun of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology.

The skeletal material was examined by Dr. Rathbun to determine the number of individuals, age, sex, and any other pertinent information represented by fragments in the collection. The following summary has been derived from his notes on the material.

INDIVIDUAL 1	Completeness:	Fragmentary
	Age:	Adult
	Sex:	Female
	Stature:	105-107 cm ( $\pm$ 4 cm)
	Condition	Charred areas on most bones. Distribution of charred areas indicated that individual was not articulated at the time charring took place.
INDIVIDUAL 2	Completeness:	Fragmentary
	Age:	30-40 years
	Sex:	Male
	Condition:	No sign of charring.
INDIVIDUAL 3	Completeness:	Very fragmentary
	Age:	Adult
	Sex:	Possibly male
	Condition:	No sign of charring.
INDIVIDUAL 4	Completeness:	Very fragmentary
	Age:	Infant
	Sex:	Indeterminate
	Condition:	A few teeth and skull fragments. No sign of charring.

Although the skeletal material was broken up during excavation of the irrigation ditch several suggestions may be made upon the relative

disposition of the individuals in the grave. Mrs. Townsend described the grave as being two and one-half to three feet deep with the skeleton curled up on its left side with the head to the west. A large number of glass beads were concentrated in the neck and chest area. The individual described by Mrs. Townsend would appear to be Individual 2. Individual 1 was a secondary burial partially burned elsewhere as indicated by charred areas on the bones. It is not possible to determine the disposition of Individuals 3 and 4 although the small number of bones represented suggest additional secondary burials.

Associated with the skeletal material are 1,127 glass trade beads and 29 iron square wrought nails. The square wrought nails all bear fragments of preserved wood from planks three-fourths inch thick indicating a box or other container was present, possibly containing the secondary burials. The glass trade beads are all of types prevalent in the second quarter of the eighteenth century. Both wire wound and tube drawn forms are present in the collection. The bead forms present are listed below. Kenneth Kidd's bead classification system was utilized in classifying the beads.

FORM	COLOR	SIZE	NUMBER
Wire wound faceted	Transluscent pale blue	2- 4 mm	38
Wire wound spherical	Opaque black	>10 mm	34
Wire wound faceted	Clear oyster white	>10 mm	32
Wire wound spherical	Clear oyster white	>10 mm	5
Wire wound faceted	Transluscent light gold	>10 mm	15
Tube drawn seed	Transluscent bright blue	2- 4 mm	38
Tube drawn spherical	Opaque white	4- 6 mm	220
Tube drawn spherical	Opaque white	6-10 mm	366
Tube drawn spherical	Transluscent pale blue	>10 mm	3
Tube drawn spherical	Transluscent bright blue	6-10 mm	1
Tube drawn spherical	Transluscent bright mint green	6-10 mm	10
Tube drawn spherical	Opaque black	6-10 mm	157
Tube drawn spherical	Opaque pale blue	6-10 mm	3
Tube drawn spherical	Opaque red exterior with clear mint green core	6-10 mm	24
Tube drawn spherical	Transluscent robin's egg blue	6-10 mm	80
Tube drawn spherical	Opaque black with three spiral white stripes	6-10 mm	3
Tube drawn spherical	Transluscent bright blue	6-10 mm	98
Tube drawn spherical	Opaque black with three red stripes centered on three white stripes	6-10 mm	2
Tube drawn spherical	Opaque white with three mint green stripes	6-10 mm	10
Tube drawn spherical	Opaque white with three red stripes centered on three bright blue stripes	6-10 mm	17
Tube drawn oblong	Opaque white with three red stripes centered on three blue stripes	4- 6 mm	2
Tube drawn oblong	Opaque white with three red stripes centered on three blue stripes	6-10 mm	11
Tube drawn oblong	Opaque white with three bright blue stripes	6-10 mm	3

The John's Island Burial was composed of a primary inhumation of an adult Indian male in conjunction with three secondary burials and a quantity of glass beads. The types of glass beads present in the Indian burial suggest that the burial took place during the second quarter of the eighteenth century. The size and number of iron square wrought nails indicate a wooden box was present in the burial pit to contain one or more of the secondary burials. It is not possible to attribute the John's Island Burial to a particular group of Indians at the present time. Future work in the area may provide other more diagnostic features which will help determine which group made the burial.

The burial from John's Island provides one of the few samples of historic trade goods recorded for Charleston County and only through the interest and cooperation of concerned individuals could the remains be recovered and studied. It is through the help of concerned individuals in all parts of the state that finds such as that reported by Mrs. Townsend can be brought to the attention of the archeologist and properly recorded.